DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 369 730 SP 035 128

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TITLE The Culture of School Violence.
PUB DATE [93]
NOTE 13p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Black Students; Comparative Analysis; Cultural Differences; *Discipline Problems; Incidence; Institutional Mission; Intermediate Grades; Junior High Schools; Middle Schools; *Policy Formation; Problem Solving; *Racial Factors; School Attitudes; Surveys; *Violence; *White Students
IDENTIFIERS *School Culture

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was twofold: (1) to examine the nature and causes of school discipline problems and school violence including an increase in the number of racial, cultural, and class hostility incidents; and (2) to offer remedies which might help alleviate disruptions to the learning process. Eight middle schools with a total of 3,212 black and 6,460 white students were surveyed to identify the most frequent incidents of rule violations and school violence by ethnicity. Findings indicated that a larger percentage of black students engaged in fighting, caused disturbances in class, showed disrespect for authority, violated school rules, and cut classes than did white students. Suggested remedies for alleviating the violence and discipline problems in public schools are offered including: clearly defining the school's mission and culture; considering the consequences of judicial mandates such as busing, racial quotas, and student due process; acknowledging cultural and ethnic differences in lifestyles, values, and beliefs; lowering the mandatory school attendance age to 14 years; and establishing transition schools for disruptive students, peer mediation teams, and compulsory orientation programs to teach the school's culture to all students. (LL)

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THE CULTURE OF SCHOOL VIOLENCE

by

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ED 369 730

School violence has reached epidemic proportions! This increase in school violence, as experienced in many of our country's schools, has a crippling effect on the whole schooling enterprise and more specifically on academic achievement. There is also an alarming increase of troubling incidents of racial, cultural, and class hostility, both inter and intraracial in our schools today.

What is the nature and causes of this violence? What are the possible realistic remedies to this alarming and troubling increase of school violence? How do the classroom teachers, principals, parents and other community individuals go about the realities of implementing the processes of schooling in such a disruptive, hostile, and violent environment?

A study was undertaken as an attempt to discover the nature and causes of school violence. Out of the nature and causes of school violence, realistic remedies are suggested which might help to alleviate the terrible disruption to the school learning process that is caused by school violence.

This survey identified the most frequent incidents of school violence. Eight middle schools, which included the fifth through

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eighth grade levels, were randomly selected as the population for this study. The total middle school population was 9,672 students. There were 3,212 black students and 6,460 white students.

Table I

FREQUENCY OF INCIDENCES OF
RULE VIOLATIONS AND SCHOOL VIOLENCE

School Level	Ethnicity	Fighting	Disturbance in Class	Disrespect for Authority	Violate School Rules	Cutting Class
Middle School (Grades 5-8)	Black	644	415	373	205	104
	White	200	202	161	113	84
TOTAL		844	617	534	318	193

Black Students	3,212
White Students	6,460
Total Middle School Population	9,672

Table I shows the school level, ethnicity and the five (5) most frequent incidents of school violence which are fighting, disturbance, disrespect for authority, violation of school rules, and cutting class.

Table II

PERCENTAGE OF RULE VIOLATIONS AND SCHOOL VIOLENCE

School Level	Ethnicity	Fighting	Disturbance in Class	Disrespect for Authority	Violate School Rules	Cutting Class
Middle School (Grades 5-8)	Black	20%	13%	12%	.06%	.03%
	White	.03%	.03%	.03%	.02%	.01%

Black Students	3,313
White Students	6,460
Total Middle School Population	9,573

Table II indicates the percentage of school violence by ethnicity.

The findings in this study indicate that a larger percentage of black students are engaged in fighting at school, causing disturbance in class, disrespect for authority, violation of school rules, and in cutting classes than are white students in the middle school grades surveyed.

The cultural differences, life styles, and appreciation for school learning that exist between black and white Americans must be truthfully faced and acknowledged. For too long now there has been a taboo against discussing the differences that exist between and among various ethnic and socio-economic groups in our country (Hanna, 1989). Until the truth about the ethnic, cultural, and value differences are confronted and discussed, we will not be able

to design a better and more productive school environment that is conducive to school learning. If we fail to acknowledge these diverse ethnic, cultural, and class differences, we will not be able to understand the culture, values, life styles, and desire for school learning of the various ethnic groups. Failure to truly admit ethnic and culture differences can only lead to a more violent and disruptive force which will impede the whole educational enterprise. If we wish to help <u>all</u> children to obtain the best education possible and to remedy the violence that presently exist in our schools, we must honestly acknowledge and confront the ethnic and cultural differences that exist.

The causes of school violence are many and complex. Most of the school's violence arise from cultural, ethnic, and special education classifications that make the schooling process nearly impossible to implement. The cultural, ethnic, special education classifications, and diversity appear in the manner of work ethics, rule and regulations adherence, and the desire for school learning. The characteristics and behavioral patterns of these children form a counter school culture which prevents the "average" non-violent, obedient school directed learner to their right to an equal educational opportunity. It is the "average" obedient school directed student in our schools that is the most discriminated against and the most neglected in terms of educational opportunities.

All ethnic and socio-economic groups must possess the basic information needed to be successful in the modern world. The schools can and must break the cycle of cultural illiteracy and that the old truth, recently rediscovered, demands a common sense education approach that once again stresses the importance of specific information in early and late school (Hirsch, 1988).

This specific information is found in teaching the school's culture. The school's culture is defined as obedience to school rules and regulations, honesty, hard work, respect for persons, property, and authority, along with integrity and responsibility for one's behavior.

The judicial system, under the guise of equity, has not considered the educational implications of their adjudication in busing, racial quotas, and student due process. These non-sensical court decrees fail to consider that equal facilities, equipment, materials, and large consolidated school systems do not make for equal educational opportunities and learning for the students.

The results of many court decrees have caused a separation of the school from the neighborhood, community, and family (Hanna, 1989). This alienation of parents and community from the school has wrought a decline in the interest and respect for property, persons, and authority. Also, the various ethnic and cultural values and lifestyles have caused a disruption to an orderly school

learning environment.

The results and effects of these forces find their expression in school violence. The violent and disruptive behavior of some students prevent a majority of learners who have a desire for school learning and are obedient to exercise their right to an equal educational opportunity. It is the average obedient student that suffers the most neglect in educational terms under the present system of mandates and court decrees.

The remedies for school violence and discipline call for the combined efforts and cooperation of parents of all ethnic and cultural origins, the courts, government, educational policy makers, and school leaders. The first task of this combined group must be to define in a clear and concise manner the school's mission and culture. The school's mission must be to teach reading, writing, number skills, and reasoning. The school's culture must be to teach children honesty, the rewards of hard work, respect for persons, property, authority, and a desire for school learning and responsibility for one's behavior..

The school's culture, as defined, represents a value system that all ethnic groups of society have in common. The mastery of the school's culture is necessary for an individual of any ethnic group to achieve economic success and obtain a share of the American dream. Therefore, the culture of the school must be

taught to all students and all students must adhere to the school's culture which is obedience to rules and regulations, honesty, hard work, respect for oneself and others, a desire for school learning, and respect for all property, persons and authority, and responsibility for one's behavior. These rules, regulations, and the culture of the school must be clearly stated and enforced fairly regardless of ethnic and cultural circumstances.

The local educational agencies should establish an orientation program prior to each school session to introduce and teach to all students coming into the educational system the school's culture. The culture of the school must be communicated clearly and concisely to all students and this orientation should be made compulsory for all students.

The teachers, principal, and personnel at each school must be helped to be firmly in control of the schooling enterprise. Teachers and principals must be free from government and judicial constraint, red tape, and paper work requirements, all of which impede the delivery of instruction. The school must be free to teach and discipline the students within the school's culture and learning environment. Furthermore, school personnel must be supported by the courts, parents, school boards, and the central office staff.

Teachers must be given time to teach and students must have

time to learn. Students and teachers must be free from fear, intimidation, bodily harm, murder, and rape in and out of our schools.

In a two-year study, the National Education Commission on Time and Learning state that both teachers and learners need more time, and that this time should be used in better, different and new ways (Felderman, 1994).

To provide more time for teachers to teach and students to learn the school day should be extended from 7:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.. The morning hour of the school day should be an opportunity for students and teachers to present the academic subjects, while the afternoon schooling would be an opportunity for physical education, remedial programs, enrichment opportunities, and other non-academic programs.

This time frame would not only provide more time for learners and teachers but would also correspond to the working schedules of most parents and other adults responsible for the students.

The school facilities would be utilized in a more efficient manner if such a time frame is incorporated as part of the school day. Also, it would help to prevent some of the school violence and keep the students off the streets.

The teachers of academic subjects should be freed from all non-academic responsibilities. In having responsibility for academic subjects only, the teachers would have more time in preparation for teaching, material selection and use, and implementation of learning activities. The clerical, and monitoring duties of the classroom teachers should be assigned to other responsible adults to insure that more instructional and learning time is available. A platoon system of professionals could be used in this kind of school time arrangement.

The local education agencies should establish an alternative school for the incorrigible student. This transition school would attempt to correct the behavior of students that are disruptive to the majority of students who would want to learn. This school would serve the dual purpose of behavior modification and also guarantee the right of the average non-violent student to his or her right to an education.

The following are suggested remedies for alleviating the violence in our public schools:

1. Clearly define the school's mission and purpose!
2. Honestly acknowledge the cultural and ethnic difference in the lifestyle, values, and beliefs that exist.
3. Give teachers time and freedom to teach, and children time and freedom to learn--freedom from fear, intimidation, bodily harm, murder, and rape.

4. Establish orientation programs to teach the school's culture as compulsory attendance for all students.
5. Establish peer mediation teams and conflict resolution teams in each school.
6. Establish a transition school for students who are disruptive elements in the regular school environment.
7. Teachers and school personnel must be helped by the Central Office staff and personnel to be firmly in control of the schooling enterprise. Free from government and judicial constraint, red tape, and paper work. Free to teach and discipline students within the school's cultural and learning environment.

In conclusion, the school's mission and purpose must be clearly defined by our policy makers in education. The school mission must be specifically defined such as to teach reading, writing, mathematics, communication, reasoning, and other academic subjects. The rules and regulations should be clearly stated and enforced fairly regardless of ethnic and cultural circumstance--with the support of the central office, school board, parents and the courts.

The school's culture must be taught to all students in a two (2) to three (3) week orientation program which emphasizes the school's expectations, learning environment protocol, and behavior that is conducive to school learning in terms of respect for

property, people, and authority. And last but not least, let us return common sense to the whole educational enterprise in terms of due process for students, special education mandates, discipline, and an alternative school for the habitual disruptive and violent student.

Can we return the school to those directly responsible for the education of our young? Can we return to the school an environment where teachers are free to teach--free from fear, intimidation, assault, battery, murder, rape--free from judicial and government red tape? Can we return to the school an environment were students who want to learn are free to do so?

Will we be equal to the challenge? Will we be up to the task? All the children in all the schools await upon our decision!

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